

SEATTLE INDIES EXPO



Juror A

Liked most about the game:

This game is tremendous fun.

The lines that indicate the trajectory of the thrown ball are very helpful.

The expanding level gives a great sense of variety, constantly changing things up throughout the game.

Navigation and jumping feel very precise, which is absolutely essential for a game like this.

The music is great, and the victory theme really accentuates the win. The slow-mo before the final goal is scored is a great touch.

The graphics are minimal, but very nice. I love how each character casts a "shadow" in their color on the platforms that they are close to. It gives a lot of visual variety to what is happening on screen while communicating useful information. Brilliant. Also, the shutter effect that occurs when a goal is scored is very cool.

Liked least about the game:

It is difficult to intuit what I was supposed to be doing at first. A lot is happening on screen, and the rules / mechanics are not immediately apparent.

Aiming feels a bit stiff or unresponsive. Given the frantic nature of the game, I could not figure out why it felt off, but I didn't find it as easy to throw the ball in the direction I wanted to throw it as I would have liked.

Suggested improvements:

This might already be in place, but perhaps too subtle for me to notice: I would like it if the ball got markedly faster the longer it is in play, to make the round more frantic as it goes. This is an idea that Lethal League implemented well. That may make goal-tending difficult, though, throwing off the balance in favor of the offense, so I'm ok with that not coming into play.

A video or printed poster explaining the basics of the game may be helpful when presenting it at SIX, so people could learn the basics while they stand in line.

A four-player free for all would be fun.

Closing thoughts:

This is my favorite of the games that I have played so far. It took us a while to figure out how to play it, but, once we got going, we had a lot of fun. This is the exact kind of game that I would love to bust out with friends for a good session of couch multiplayer (if I had enough controllers).

The game screen appears to be rather busy at first, but we quickly learn to attenuate on particular items and drown out the rest. Though it was a controversial decision in the group I played this with, I really liked that the game momentarily paused when someone caught the ball. It alerted everyone, even those focusing on other things, that something important was happening somewhere that might require their attention.

Juror B

Liked most about the game:

I think my favorite thing would be the progression the levels do (with the widening) as the scores rack up, it goes a long way with communicating how the game is progressing.

The slow motion final shot is *awesome* and I'm thankful for it. It does a great job of the buildup to the completion of the game. Bonus points also for announcing that the next point will be for the victory.

The multi-ball coming in if the score round is taking too long is a brilliant idea.

Dash is really fun and useful, it reminds me a lot of the Towerfall dash.

Liked least about the game:

I found the team selection screen pretty confusing, namely trying to tie in which character I was on screen and what team I'm on. While everyone else is moving their character around trying to understand the same thing it's hard to tie in which one I'm moving.

The constant interruption of the game everytime someone shot the ball or grabbed and shot another person was disorienting and honestly, frustrating. It's difficult to do fast paced platforming and get the timing for jumps right when the scale of time is constantly freezing every couple seconds.

Also, since I was under the impression to shoot the ball in the opposite team's goal, aimed for blue and basically ended up scoring a point for them. Whomp whomp. That definitely needs some clearing up.

Suggested improvements:

While the interruption of time during ball shooting does seem dramatically important, I'd say try removing it from the grabbing and throwing of other people at the very least. That tended to cascade into a constant interruption and got pretty annoying.

I never quite got the hang of the aiming controls, but all my guesses I think seemed to work. I couldn't describe it to anyone else how to do it, but I sorta knew how.

Definitely clean up the team selection screen. Make it clearer which one of the little dudes on the screen which controller/player is moving. Don't allow a player to press Start and end up starting the game when they themselves didn't set themselves to a team yet.

Closing thoughts:

I was maybe a little salty on this game at first but I warmed up to it fairly quick. I think with some tightening up of certain mechanics it could definitely be a fantastic multiplayer competitive game.

A quit-game menu is probably important to get in soon, as we couldn't figure out how to back out and restart the game (with the controller at least, but we ended up just alt+f4ing)

The graphics are pretty bare bones pixel art. I do like the tiny character's designs, but it's not a game with a distinct visual identity yet I feel.

We played this game for quite a bit, and ended up coming back to it even. I feel like this would be a great game to play at SIX.

Juror C

Liked most about the game:

The gameplay, probably. I know, that's incredibly vague, but its a solid multiplayer game and the game design is great. It definitely brings out the competitive nature that you expect and enjoy in a multiplayer game. Its a bit of a steep learning curve to get used to the frequent pausing, but once you go the hang of it, it was really fun to play and pretty easy to handle.

Liked least about the game:

The constant pausing was really disorienting for play. If several people are in a cluster around a ball, the game moves forward incredibly slowly just because of the constant interrupts. You do eventually get used to it, but it still feels like there might be a better way to handle the situation. I understand why its in there, and perhaps there isn't a better way to go about it, but it does continue to feel a bit disorienting.

Suggested improvements:

- + Able to exit a game once it has been started
- + You may have already tried this, but it might be a little less disorienting if only the player shooting were paused, and the rest of the game continued at normal pace. I know it would change the gameplay quite a bit, but the pausing is really difficult to get used to in the beginning.
- + Allow for variation in gameplay length. I wanted to be able to extend it to more points, though I understand how difficult that might be since you zoom out with every point.
- + Might toy with giving the players a little more speed, or some other way to counteract the feel of tactical choicelessness during two player games. Or perhaps just strongly encourage 4+ players.

+ Perhaps give people some choices when it comes to their characters. I kept making sure I was the second person to join the red team cause I wanted to be the orange cat, I think players might enjoy being able to switch between a few different sprites.

Closing thoughts:

It's a really fun multiplayer game that encourages proper shouting and anger when one has been thwarted, as well as victory arm waving and smack talking when one succeeds. The art is pretty adorable in its simplicity. The orange character is the cutest. I really enjoyed being able to throw people around, not only was it a good tactic but it allowed for that in-game 'taunt' kind of communication that you can have with other players that's quite fun.

Juror D

Liked most about the game:

The simple rules and easy to understand mechanics, along with the awesome polish that has gone into making it feel really skill based and intense.

I loved how the level expanded and the goal moved for whichever team scored previously. It's a fantastic element to ramp up gameplay and complexity while still giving the underdogs an advantage.

Liked least about the game:

I'm having mixed feelings about the power ups. I definitely liked the two I experienced (the color changing one, and the size increasing one), but did I like what they added as much as the rest of the game? Hard to say.

Also, sometimes it was hard for me to be able to tell how quickly the ball was going to slow down after being shot. I don't think the velocity of it being shot is ever any different, nor is the drag ever any different, but still, I never quite got the hang of being able to anticipate it's speed.

Suggested improvements:

- It took me quite a while to be able to tell whether or not I was the one who grabbed the ball. Or if I was picked up by another player or I grabbed another player. I think there's a color change or something when the game pauses for a second and the target receptacle appears, but in that moment it still takes me slightly longer to process which player did what.

- Additional visual improvements. I really love the visual style here, so I'm not sure what more I need. It just seems like there could be more, perhaps with the characters or feedback systems. Not sure.

- Something about the aiming didn't quite feel as easy to control, but I'm not sure why.

Closing thoughts:

I frigging loved this. I'm sad I was so busy at Power of Play that I didn't get a chance to play this - but I also never like playing games at Expos so I really enjoyed the fact I got to experience this with my friends when judging this for SIX. The intensity of gameplay reminded me a lot of Pacman CE on XBLA when it first game out, but in a competitive sense, which is a great thing.

Juror E

Liked most about the game:

I really liked the general mechanics and the depth of gameplay. The stage expanding upon each goal was extremely clever - some games get really disorienting with rapid stage changes. I also liked the general art style and the niche it occupied, and thought it was well executed with polished visual effects. My absolute favorite part was the slow-mo effect as the ball neared a goal.

Liked least about the game:

It felt like it took a while for us to really understand the game. There were a few rounds of total confusion before everyone finally kind of went, "Oh, we get it! This is fun now."

A few people really disliked the entire game pausing when someone else caught the ball, but a few people really liked it and thought that was what made the game as great & fun as it was.

Suggested improvements:

- I know people hate this, but add some kind of optional explanation or tutorial level so people can learn the ropes. Getting grabbed & shot by people was pretty confusing.
- My personal suggestion would be to tone down the flashing ever so slightly. It adds tons of character to the game but it can also be super distracting at times.
- I would love to see more customization & variety. E.g., let users choose their team color, more variety in character silhouette, background art, stage design.

Closing thoughts:

Bitball is definitely a game with a slight learning curve and not for the newest of gamers. However, once you've learned the ropes and become adept at the game, it becomes infinitely fun and with a lot of depth in its gameplay. It has a unique and minimal art style which doesn't stop it having tons of visual effects in the same fun style. Overall, it's a great competitive game to sit down and play with friends with no-holds-barred trash talk.